

2017

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Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**



DISTRICT 15 HUNTING PROSPECTS

Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties

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DISTRICT 15 GENERAL OVERVIEW

Administratively, District 15 includes Mason, Kitsap, and East Jefferson counties, and is one of four districts (11, 15, 16, and 17) that collectively comprise the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) Region 6. District 15 consists of all or portions of six game management units (GMUs): 621 (Olympic), 624 (Coyle), 627 (Kitsap), 633 (Mason), 636 (Skokomish), and 651 (Satsop). A portion of GMUs 621 and 624 fall within District 16. A portion of GMUs 636 and 651 fall within District 17.

The landscape in District 15 is dominated by industrial forest land, and the most common habitat is characterized by multi-aged forests consisting primarily of Douglas fir and red alder. However, other habitats do occur, ranging from alpine in areas adjacent to Olympic National Park to marine in the Hood Canal and Puget Sound.

A range of hunting opportunities are available in District 15, including elk, deer, bear, cougar, mountain goat, waterfowl (including sea ducks), and grouse. Also, a variety of small game species like rabbit, quail, coyote, and bobcat are present. Table 1 presents estimates of harvest for most game species in District 15 during the 2016 hunting season, and how those estimates compare to the 2015 season and the five-year average. For more specific information on harvest trends, please refer to the appropriate section in this document.

Species	Harvest		
	5-year avg.	2015	2016
Elk	34	34	42
Deer	1,828	1,918	2,246
Mountain Goat	n/a	1	5
Bear	67	64	49
Cougar	9	4	8
Ducks	6,271	5,387	6,443
Canada Goose	354	204	262
Snipe	6	0	202
Grouse	2,699	2,739	3,307
Mourning Dove	168	0	116
Quail	105	397	0
Snowshoe Hare	6	11	0
Cottontail Rabbit	74	102	13

Table 1. Estimates of the 2015, 2016, and 5-year average annual harvest for most game species hunted in District 15 are shown. Waterfowl and small-game harvest totals were tabulated from all of Mason, Kitsap, and Jefferson counties. For cougar, only general hunting season harvest is shown.

ELK

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

All elk in District 15 are Roosevelt elk. District 15 contains those portions of the Olympic elk herd occurring in GMUs 621, 624, 633, 636 and 651. GMU 627 is not included in any elk herd plan. There are no known elk herds currently in GMUs 627 or 633. The quality of elk hunting in District 15 can generally be described as fair. GMU 651 provides the only general season elk hunting opportunity in the district, while elk hunting in GMUs 621 and 636 is by permit only. GMUs 621 and 636 are managed with the primary goal of increasing elk numbers while minimizing negative elk-human interactions, including elk depredation to agricultural crops. Elk in GMU 624 primarily reside near the town of Sequim in District 16 and management is primarily based on minimizing negative elk-human interactions. This herd also uses a portion of GMU 621. GMU 651 is managed with the primary goal of promoting stable or increasing elk numbers while also minimizing negative elk-human interactions.

Elk in the District 15 portion of GMU 621 can be found along the main river valleys, including the Dosewallips, Duckabush, Hamma Hamma, North Fork Skokomish rivers and near Lilliwaup Swamp. Elk in the Dosewallips and Duckabush rivers either remain in the lower river valleys and on adjacent valley ridges year-round, or migrate to summer range in Olympic National Park. The Hamma Hamma and Lilliwaup herds are generally non-migratory. The North Fork Skokomish herd is primarily resident to the upper North Fork Skokomish River valley in Olympic National Park above Lake Cushman, often wintering near the northern end of the lake before migrating to summer range in the Mount Skokomish Wilderness. GMU 621 is open to

hunting by permit only. There is not a good estimate for elk abundance in GMU 621. However, based on herd counts and the increase in elk damage/conflict reports, the department is probably at or above the management objective for this unit.

Elk in GMU 636 can primarily be found in the upper Wynoochee River valley, the Skokomish River valley, and near the town of Matlock. Although some herds remain non-migratory, migratory movement has been documented from the upper Wynoochee to Olympic National Park and the North Fork Skokomish River at Lake Cushman, as well as movement up the South Fork Skokomish river valley into Olympic National Park. GMU 636 is open to hunting by permit only. Although there is not a current estimate, anecdotal data suggests the elk population in GMU 636 is likely below management objectives overall, but in some cases individual herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict.

Elk in GMU 651 are distributed across the GMU among roughly 13 non-migratory sub-herds. However, herd size/number remains dynamic. Although we do not have a current estimate, anecdotal data suggests the elk population in GMU 651 is likely below management objectives overall, but in some cases individual sub-herds that primarily occupy private agricultural lands are likely at or above thresholds for elk damage/conflict.

For more detailed information about the status of Washington's elk herds, hunters should read the most recent version of the Game Status and Trend Report, which is available for download on the department's website.

WHICH GMU SHOULD ELK HUNTERS HUNT?

Hunting is influenced by multiple factors, including elk abundance, weather, access, hunting pressure, and hunting season regulations. Most elk hunting in District 15 is by permit. In 2017, permits are available for all three weapon types to hunt in GMUs 621 (14 bull permits) and 636 (nine bull permits). Most elk hunting in GMU 624 is accomplished through the Master Hunter program targeting the Sequim herd. General season hunting is allowed in GMU 651, including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. In 2015, a general late-season muzzleloader elk hunt was added to GMU 651 as part of a statewide increase in muzzleloader hunting opportunities. Although both GMUs 627 and 633 are open for general season elk hunting, hunters should avoid these GMUs, as no recent observations of elk have been reported for these units.

Many of the elk herds in GMUs 621, 624, and 636 spend a considerable amount of time on small private land parcels often associated with pastures, so access to hunt may be limited in some areas. In GMU 651, the Green Diamond Resource Company requires an access permit to hunt a significant portion of their timberlands in this unit. For hunters looking for areas with the least amount of pressure and little to no private land access issues, WDFW recommends applying for an elk permit in GMU 636 and hunting the upper Wynoochee Valley area or GMU 621 and hunting mostly DNR land near the Lilliwaup Swamp. Both of these areas will require some effort to hunt, as motorized access is often limited, but because of this, the hunting pressure can be lighter.

Tribal hunting occurs in all three GMUs and often accounts for 50 percent or more of the total elk harvest in District 15 (see Figure 1 below), so the actual hunting pressure in these units is greater than WDFW hunting season statistics and permit levels might suggest.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

Elk and hunter numbers are not likely to fluctuate dramatically between years. The number of elk permits in GMU 621 for the 2017 season is 14 (five archery, two muzzleloader, and seven modern firearm) and the hunt dates include additional days for all three weapon types. Average hunter success in this unit can be a little misleading because of the small number of permits, but five-year averages by weapon type are 27 percent success for archery, 42 percent for muzzleloaders, and 46 percent for modern firearm hunters. Actual success has been reported as low as 0 percent in some years.

There are nine permits available for GMU 636 elk hunters (five archery, one muzzleloader, and three modern firearm) and the hunt dates include additional days for all three weapon types. Hunter success in this unit has been quite low, often at 0 percent for all three weapon types. Rifle hunters generally report the highest success, with a five-year average of 43 percent, followed by muzzleloaders at 20 percent, and archery hunters at 10 percent.

General season hunting during the archery and modern firearm seasons is allowed in GMU 651, including a 3-point minimum or antlerless season in Elk Area 6061 for archery hunters. In 2015, a late muzzleloader season was added to GMU 651, and the one quality bull permit available to rifle hunters in the unit was dropped.

The number of elk harvested in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 is shown in Figure 1, while general season trend data for hunter numbers and success in GMU 651 is presented in Figures 2 and 3. Cow harvest totals include Master Hunter permit harvest conducted to reduce elk damage to agricultural crops.

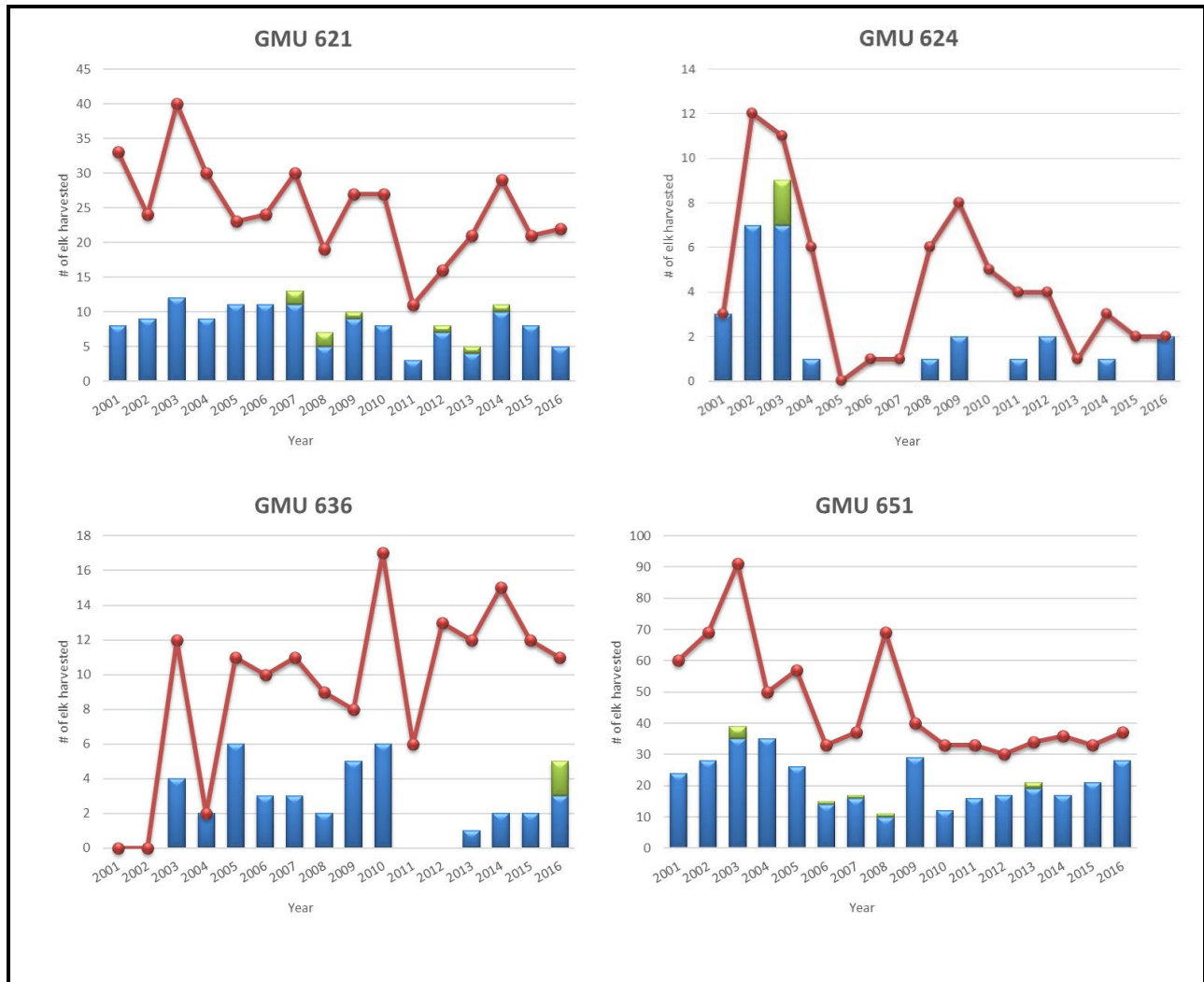


Figure 1. The number of bull (blue) and cow (green) elk harvested during state seasons and total number of elk harvested from all sources (red line) in GMUs 621, 624, 636, and 651 during 2001–2016. Tribal harvest is included in the total harvest.

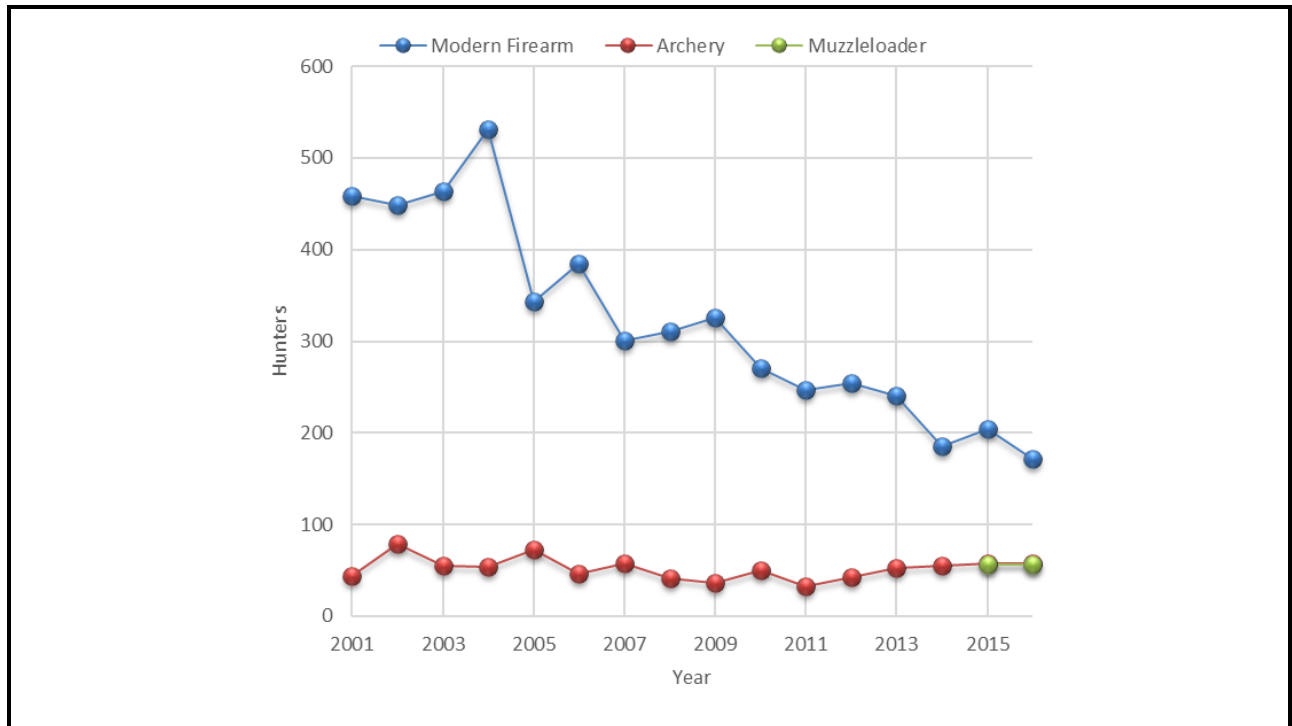


Figure 2. Trends in elk hunter numbers during the general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader seasons in GMU 651, 2001–2016. A general late season muzzleloader hunt was added in 2015.

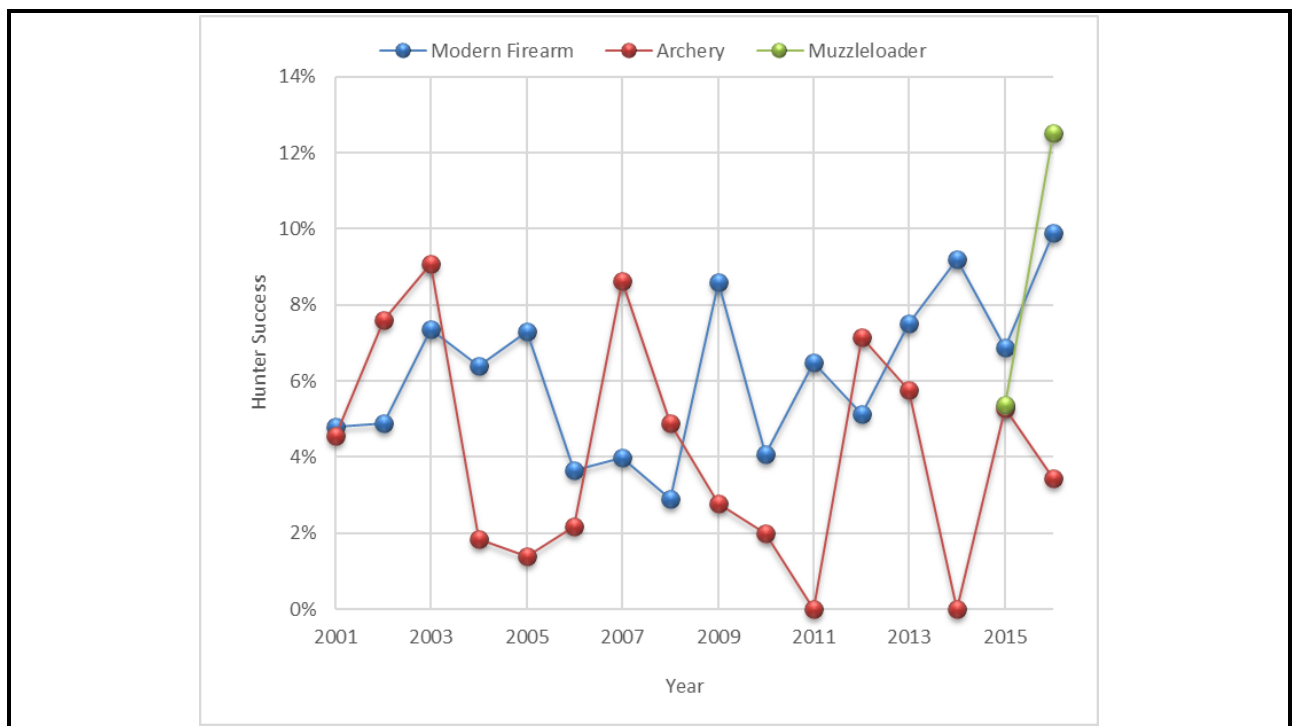


Figure 3. Trends in hunter success rates during general elk seasons in GMU 651, 2001–2016. A general late season muzzleloader hunt was added in 2015.

ELK AREAS

There are two Elk Areas in District 15: Elk Area 6061 (Twin Satsop) and Elk Area 6071 (Dungeness). Elk Area 6061 was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic elk damage issues, while Elk Area 6071 was established to limit elk hunting for safety reasons.

Current hunting regulations allow the harvest of 3-point minimum bull or antlerless elk during the general early archery season in Elk Area 6061, while elk hunting in Elk Area 6071 is usually conducted through the Master Hunter program on a limited basis.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Season dates and permits available in 2017 will be similar to 2016.

ELK HOOF DISEASE (TREPONEME BACTERIA)

Since 2008, reports of elk with deformed, broken, or missing hooves have increased dramatically in southwest Washington, with sporadic observations in other areas west of the Cascade Range. While elk have long suffered from “hoof rot,” a relatively common livestock disease, the rapid spread and severity of this new affliction was something altogether different.

Scientific tests commissioned by WDFW in 2013 found that these abnormalities were strongly associated with treponeme bacteria, known to cause digital dermatitis in cattle, sheep and goats. Although this disease has plagued the dairy industry for decades, the treponeme bacteria had never before been documented in elk or any other wildlife species.

Since then, WDFW has continued to work with scientists, veterinarians, outdoor organizations and others to develop management strategies for elk infected by treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD).

Several aspects of TAHD in elk are clear:

- **Vulnerability:** The disease appears to be highly infectious among elk, but there is no evidence that it affects humans. TAHD can affect any hoof in any elk, young or old, male or female.
- **Hooves only:** Tests show the disease is limited to animals’ hooves, and does not affect their meat or organs. If the meat looks normal and if hunters harvest, process and cook it practicing good hygiene, it is probably safe to eat.
- **No treatment:** Currently, there is no vaccine to prevent the disease, nor are there any proven options for treating it in the field. Similar diseases in livestock are treated by cleaning and bandaging their hooves and giving them foot baths, but that is not a realistic option for free-ranging elk.

Counties with confirmed cases of TAHD

As of March 2016, WDFW had confirmed cases of elk afflicted with TAHD in Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties. In the year that followed a few additional cases were also documented in Thurston, Mason and King counties.

Since 2015, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has also confirmed TAHD in elk populations in both western and eastern Oregon.

How hunters can help

- **Leave hooves:** Scientists believe that treponeme bacteria are associated with moist soil and spread to new areas on the hooves of infected elk. For that reason, WDFW requires hunters to remove the hooves of any elk taken in affected areas and leave them onsite. During the 2017-18 hunting season, this rule applies to GMUs 407, 418, 437, 454, 501-564, 633, 636 and 642-699.
- **Report elk:** Hunters can help WDFW track TAHD by reporting observations of both affected and unaffected elk on the department's [online reporting form](#).
- **Clean shoes and tires:** Anyone who hikes or drives off-road in a known affected area can help minimize the risk of spreading the disease to new areas by removing all mud from their shoes and tires before leaving the area.

WDFW is currently studying the effects of the disease on Washington elk populations and the state Legislature approved \$1.5 million to support efforts by Washington State University to monitor and research the disease.

DEER

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) are the only species of deer in District 15. They are managed to maintain productive populations while providing for multiple uses, including recreational, educational, and aesthetic (WDFW Game Management Plan 2008). Buck harvest is generally any antlered buck,. Antlerless harvest is limited to certain weapon types and/or by permit.

Overlapping with the early archery season, the Olympic Wilderness areas in District 15 are also open to modern firearm and muzzleloader hunters during the high buck hunt, which goes from Sept. 15-25. WDFW does not have data to estimate either participation or success during this hunt, but assumes both are quite low in comparison to general season hunting. Harvest in these areas is restricted to 3-point minimum bucks.

Currently, WDFW does not use formal estimates or indices of population size to monitor deer populations in District 15. Instead, trends in harvest, hunter success, and harvest per unit effort are used as surrogates to a formal index or estimate of population size. WDFW recognizes the limitations of using harvest data to monitor trends in population size and the agency is currently evaluating new approaches to monitoring black-tailed deer populations independent of harvest data.

For more detailed information related to the status of black-tailed deer in Washington, hunters should read through the most recent version of the [Game Status and Trend Report](#), which is available for download on the department's website.

WHICH GMU SHOULD DEER HUNTERS HUNT?

There are ample general season deer hunting opportunities for archery, muzzleloader, and modern firearm hunters in District 15 (Table 2). Field observations and recent harvest trends suggest good deer hunting potential exists in GMUs 621, 627, and 633. GMU 651 remains a popular hunting unit, but portions of this GMU owned by Green Diamond Resources will require an access permit. Good deer hunting can be found in lower elevation habitats in GMU 636, but deer density in this unit appears to decline at higher elevations. The department suspects this is largely related to habitat quality and available forage.

Table 2. 2017 general hunting seasons and legal deer descriptions for GMUs 621, 624, 627, 633, 636, and 651.

2017 General Deer Seasons						
GMU	Modern Firearm		Archery		Muzzleloader	
	Early	Late	Early	Late	Early	Late
621	Oct. 14-31, Any buck	Nov. 16-19, Any Buck	Sep. 1-29, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov 22-Dec 15, Any Buck
624	Oct. 14-31, Any buck	Nov. 16-19, Any Buck	Sep. 1-29, Any Deer	Nov. 22-Dec 31, Any Deer	Sep. 30 – Oct. 8, Any Buck	Closed
627	Oct. 14-31, Any buck	Nov. 16-19, Any Buck	Sep. 1-29, Any Deer	Nov. 22-Dec 31, Any Deer	Sep. 30 – Oct. 8, Any Deer	Closed
633	Oct. 14-31, Any buck	Nov. 16-19, Any Buck	Sep. 1-29, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov. 22-Dec. 15, Any Deer
636	Oct. 14-31, Any buck	Nov. 16-19, Any buck	Sep. 1-29, Any Deer	Nov. 22-Dec 31, Any Deer	Sep. 30 – Oct. 8, Any Buck	Closed
651	Oct. 14-31, Any buck	Nov. 16-19, Any Buck	Sep. 1-29, Any Deer	Closed	Closed	Nov. 22-Dec. 15, Any Buck

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

It is uncommon for deer populations to fluctuate dramatically from year to year, especially in District 15, where severe winter weather resulting in large die-offs rarely occurs. Hunter numbers also typically do not change dramatically from one year to the next, unless there is a dramatic shift in hunting regulations or access. Consequently, the best predictor of future harvest during general seasons is recent trends in harvest, hunter numbers, and hunter success. Figures 4 through 6 provide trend data for each of these statistics by GMU and are intended to provide hunters with the best information possible to make an informed decision on where they want to hunt in District 15, as well as what they can expect to encounter with regard to hunter success and hunter numbers.



Figure 4. Trends in the total number of buck (blue) and antlerless (green) deer harvested during general modern firearm, archery, and muzzleloader deer seasons combined, 2001–2016. Total deer harvest (red line) includes harvest from all sources, including tribal harvest.

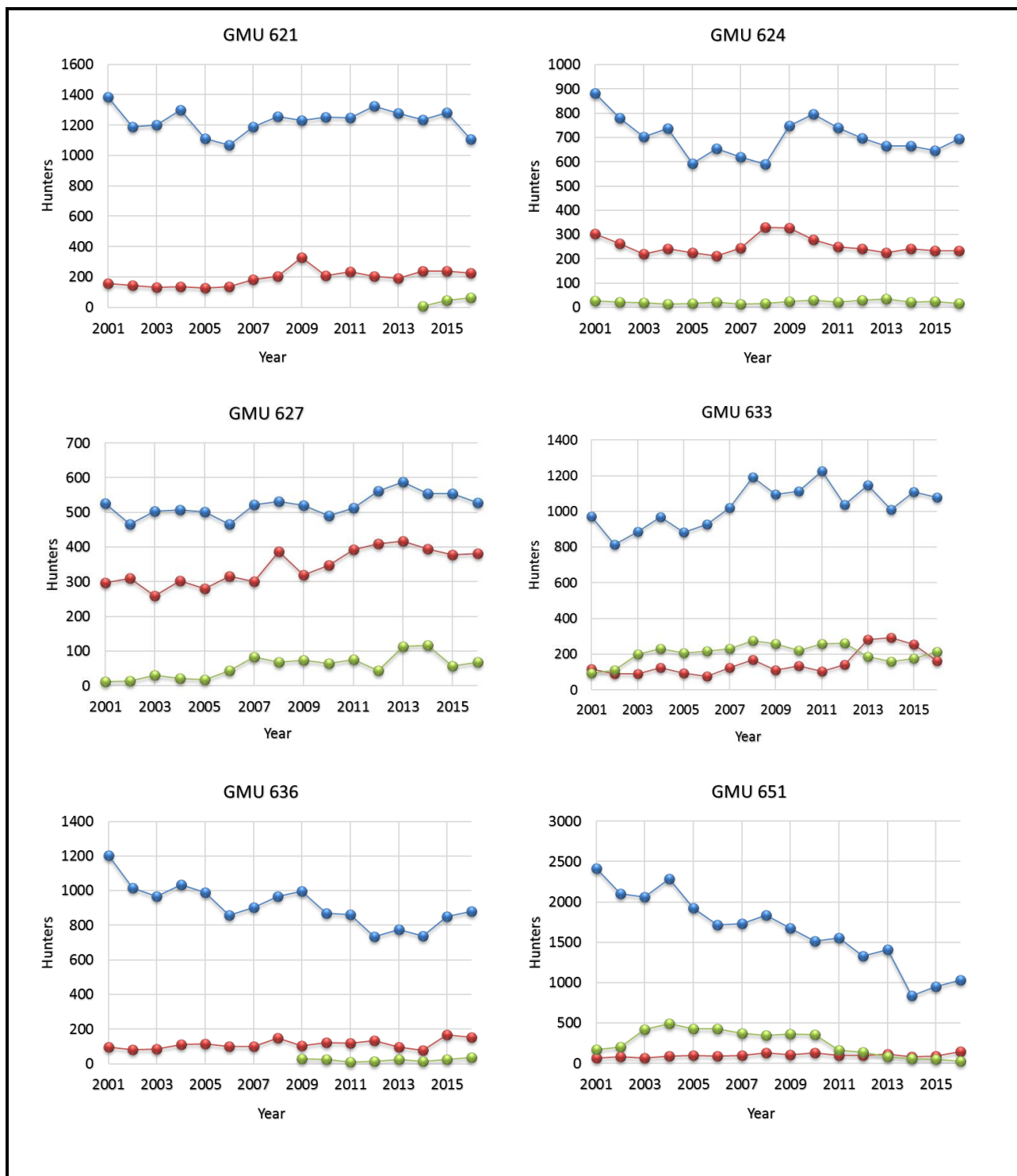


Figure 5. Trends in hunter numbers during general modern firearm (blue), archery (red), and muzzleloader (green) deer seasons in District 15, 2001–2016.

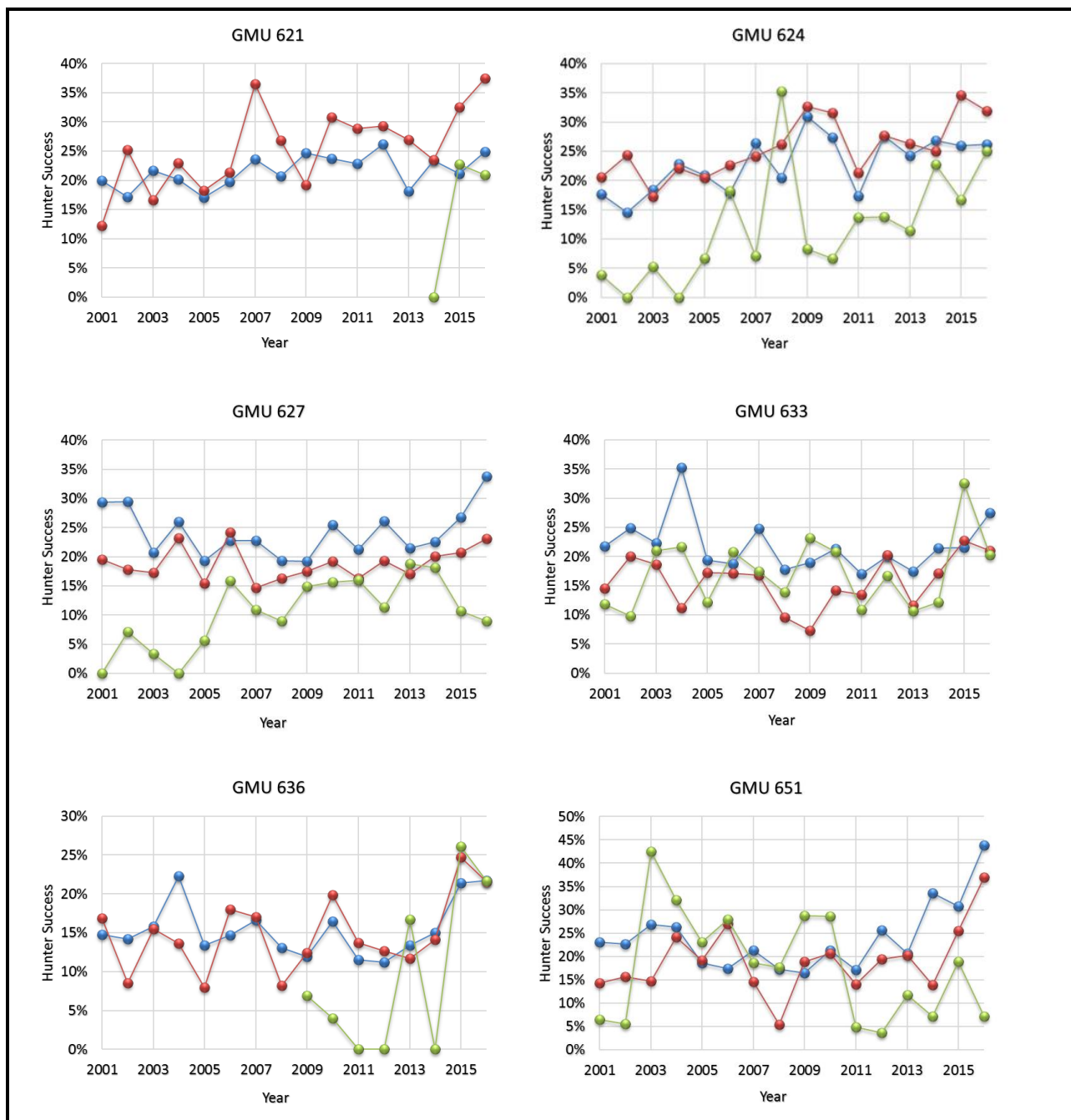


Figure 6. Trends in hunter success rates during general modern firearm (blue), archery (red), and muzzleloader (green) deer seasons in District 15, 2001–2016.

DEER AREAS

Deer Area 6020 is located in GMU 624 and was established primarily to aid in addressing chronic damage issues. This GMU is open to general season any deer harvest for all three weapon-type user groups. Additionally, 40 second deer permits are available for archery hunters in this area.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

There are very few changes anticipated for deer hunting in District 15, although permit levels for some hunts were adjusted.

MOUNTAIN GOAT

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS



Mountain goats were introduced into the Olympic Mountains prior to the establishment of Olympic National Park (ONP) in the 1920s (Houston et al. 1994). Mountain goats thrived in the Olympic range, rapidly expanding their distribution and abundance to an estimated high of 1175 (± 171 SE) in 1983 (Houston et al. 1986). Concerns over the negative effect of an abundant introduced goat population on high-elevation endemic plants and soil erosion prompted Olympic National Park to relocate 407 goats to other ranges outside the Olympics in the early

1980s (National Park Service, 1995). Additionally, from 1983 until 1997, 119 goats were taken outside ONP during legal hunting seasons (Jenkins et al. 2016). WDFW closed the Olympic goat hunt in 1997. Since 2004, the mountain goat population in the Olympic range has grown at an estimated annual rate of 8 percent, and in July 2016 was estimated to range from 561-741 goats (Jenkins et al. 2016). Along with an increasing goat population in ONP, mountain goats were expanding their range and abundance to wilderness areas outside ONP. WDFW established a new permit hunt in 2014 with two designated hunt areas in the eastern Olympics, the Brothers and Mount Washington hunt units. These permit hunts should be viewed as management hunts, with two principal objectives being to provide recreational hunting opportunity and to reduce goat numbers in areas where human-goat conflicts are occurring.

Six permits were distributed between the two hunt units and two adult nannies were taken in 2014. In 2015, all of the Olympic goat permits were transferred to a new Conflict Reduction

Mountain Goat special permit category. Olympic goat hunt units, Mount Washington and the Brothers, were combined into one large unit called the East Olympic Mountains A and B. Six goat permits were offered during the 2015 hunting season, divided between two goat seasons: early (Sept. 15 – 25) and late (Sept. 26 – Oct. 5). Of these, five hunters reported hunting and one hunter killed a nanny. Six permits were also issued in 2016, and five hunters harvested five goats (three billies and two nannies). Tribal hunting for mountain goats in the eastern Olympics occasionally occurs, but no goats were harvested by Tribal hunters in 2016.

As with any mountain goat hunt, hunters can expect rugged, strenuous hunting conditions as they pursue goats in the designated Olympic goat hunt unit. There are very few maintained trails to access many of the areas where mountain goats can be found in this unit, so hunters should be prepared to navigate challenging terrain. For some areas, the hunt boundary transects right across the mountain top, and goats can easily move between Olympic National Park, where hunting is not allowed, and the permit hunt area. WDFW would recommend hunters focus efforts near Mount Ellinor, Mount Washington, Mount Pershing, Jefferson Peak, or the Brothers. Of course, mountain goats may be found in other areas of the goat unit, so consider the above as a starting point for scouting. Very few goats were seen north of Mount Constance in the Buckhorn during the most recent surveys.

Some jumping off points include the Mount Ellinor trail, Mildred Lakes trail, or Jefferson Ridge trail for the Mount Ellinor-Washington-Pershing-Jefferson area, or the Lena Lakes trail for the Brothers area. These are very popular hiking trails, so be aware of hikers and be absolutely sure of your target before firing. Roadside observation points can be found at the Mount Ellinor trailhead parking lot, near the parking lot for the Mildred Lakes trail, where the U.S. Forest Service Road 2401 crosses Jefferson Creek, and possibly off the end of USFS 2402 for the Brothers. Please note that the maintained parking areas on USFS lands require a USFS Forest Service pass.

Additional information can be found at [USFS Skokomish Wilderness](#), [Mount Ellinor Trail](#), [Mildred Lakes Trail](#), and [The Brothers Wilderness](#), [Lena Lakes Trail](#), [The Brothers Trail](#), and Washington Trails Association - [Trip Reports](#).

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

The number of permits and season dates in 2017 will be similar the 2016 season.

BEAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Black bears occur throughout District 15, but population densities vary among GMUs. The best opportunities to harvest a black bear likely occur in GMUs 621, 627, 633, and 636.

District 15 contains part of the Coastal Black Bear Management Unit (BBMU) (GMUs 621, 636, and 651) and part of the Puget Sound BBMU (GMUs 624, 627, and 633). The current black bear hunting season guidelines for these BBMUs are designed to maintain black bear populations at their current level. The fall black bear hunting season for all District 15 units is August 1 to November 15, 2017. Hunters can purchase up to two bear tags during each license year.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

The majority of bear harvest in District 15 comes from hunters killing a bear opportunistically while hunting other species like deer and elk, although some hunters do specifically hunt bears. Hunter success in District 15 has averaged 4 percent in the Coastal BBMU and 7 percent in the Puget Sound BBMU over the last five years. However, hunter success is likely higher for those hunters who specifically hunt bears versus those who buy a bear tag just in case they see one while they are deer or elk hunting.

Bear harvest in District 15 decreased slightly in 2016 in both the Coastal and Puget Sound BBMUs (Figure 7). At the GMU level, most bears will be harvested in GMUs 621 and 627 (Figure 8). Overall, WDFW expects similar harvest and success rates during the 2017 season.

NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

There are no notable changes expected for the 2017 bear hunting season in District 15.

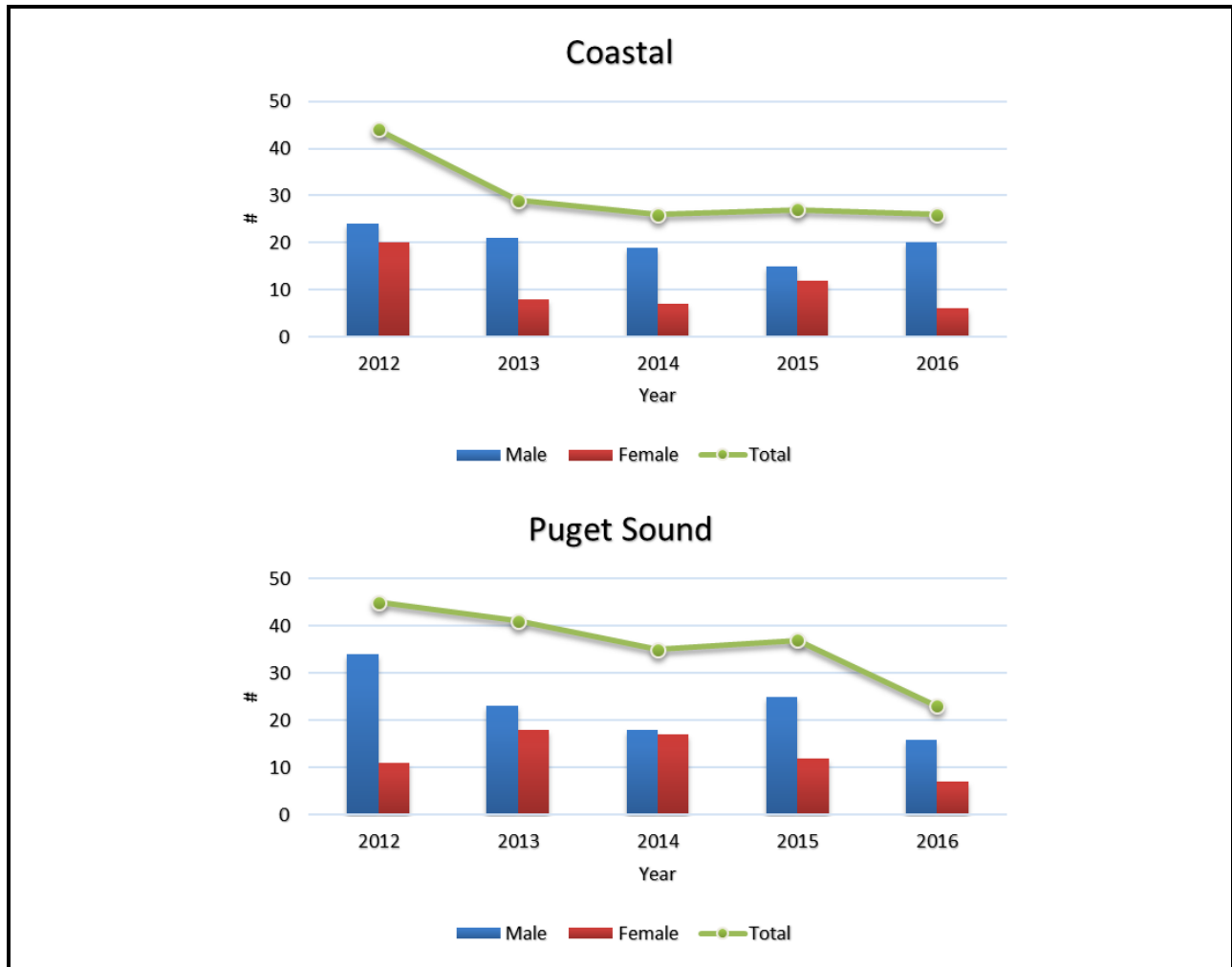


Figure 7. Trends in the number of male and female black bears and total number of bears harvested during the general bear season in District 15, 2012–2016. Bears removed for safety reasons are not included.

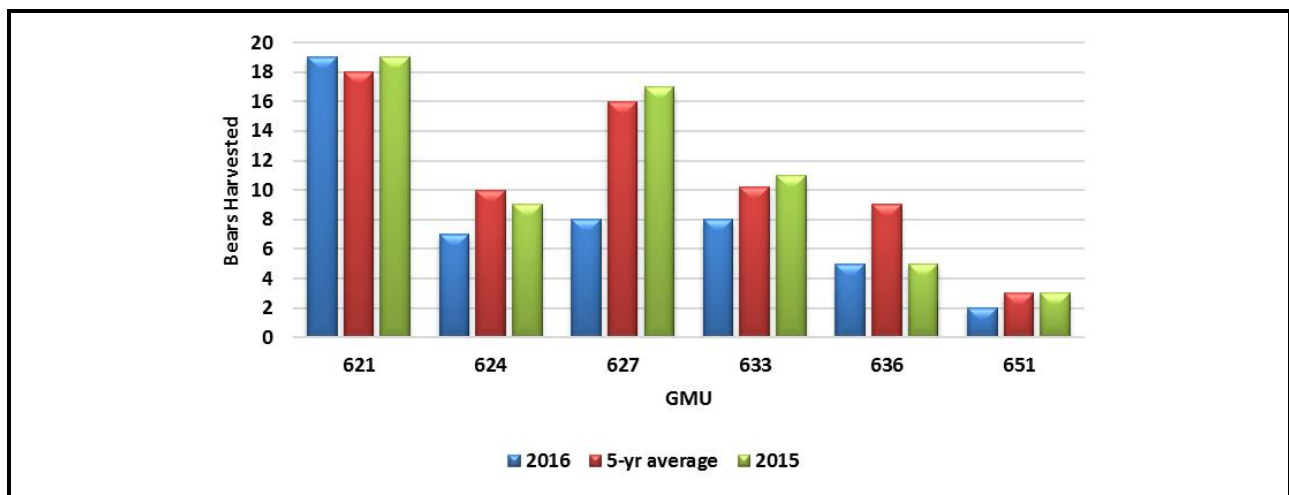


Figure 8. The number of bears harvested in each GMU during the 2015 and 2016 seasons in District 15. Also included is the five-year average for total number of bears harvested in each GMU.

COUGAR

GENERAL INFORMATION, MANAGEMENT GOALS, AND POPULATION STATUS

Cougars occur throughout District 15 and hunting seasons are established with the primary objective of maintaining a stable cougar population. Beginning in 2012, WDFW changed to a standardized approach for establishing harvest guidelines based on habitat availability and a standard general season. The intent was to have a longer season, without any weapon restrictions, and only close cougar seasons in specific areas if harvest reached or exceeded a harvest guideline.

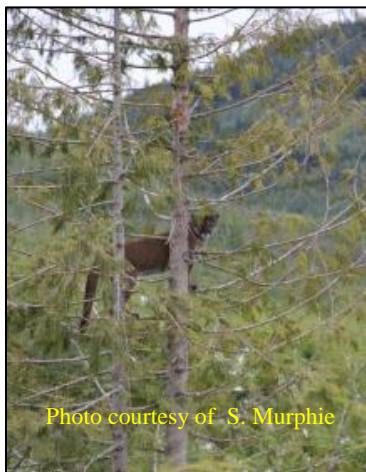


Photo courtesy of S. Murphie

WDFW established a series of hunt areas with standard early season dates of September 1 through December 31 and late season dates from January 1 to April 30, or when the harvest guideline is reached, whichever comes first. Harvest numbers are examined starting January 1, and any hunt area that meets or exceeds the harvest guideline may be closed. Anyone planning to hunt cougar after January 1 is advised to confirm the cougar season is open in the desired hunting area. Harvest guidelines for each hunt area

located in District 15 are provided in Table 3.

For more information related to the new harvest guidelines management approach, please visit the WDFW website or [click here](#).

Table 3. Harvest guidelines and the reported 2016-17 harvest for the three cougar hunt areas located in District 15.

Hunt Area	Harvest Guideline 2016	2016-2017 Harvest
618, 636, 638	4-5	2
642, 648, 651	6-8	10
621, 624, 627, 633	None	8

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING THE 2017 SEASON

Most cougar harvest comes from opportunistic encounters while hunters are pursuing deer, elk, or other activities, meaning total cougar harvest in District 15 can vary from year to year (Figure 9). Since 2012, the number of cougars harvested annually in District 15 has averaged 10. Harvest is usually highest in GMUs 636 and 651.

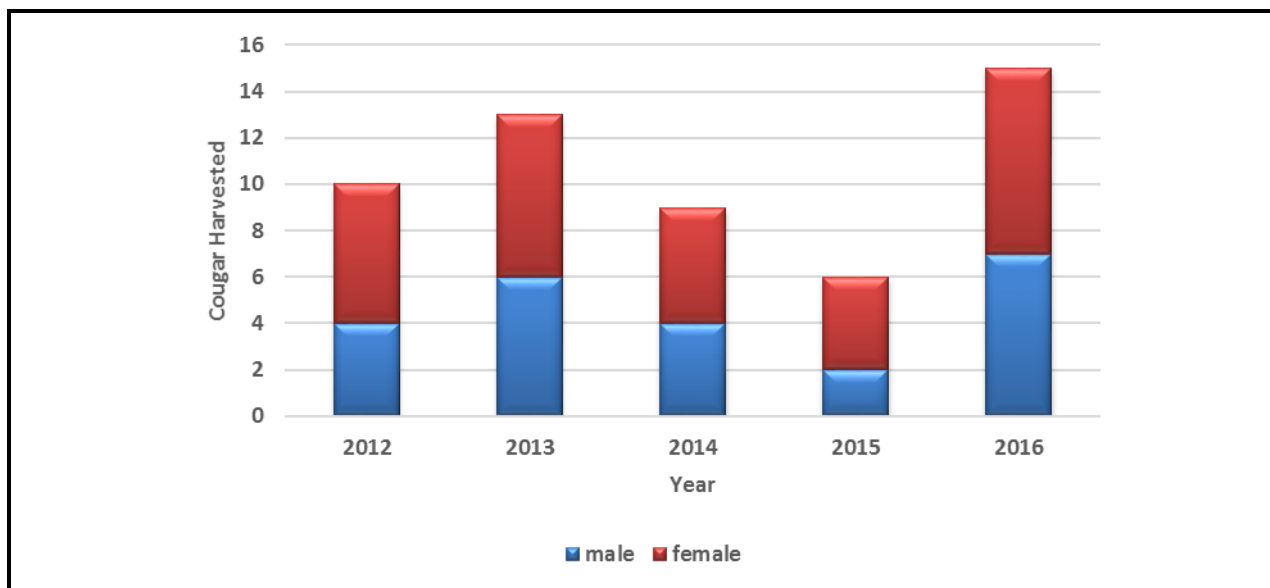


Figure 9. The estimated number of male and female cougar harvested annually in District 15 (all GMUs combined), 2012–2016.

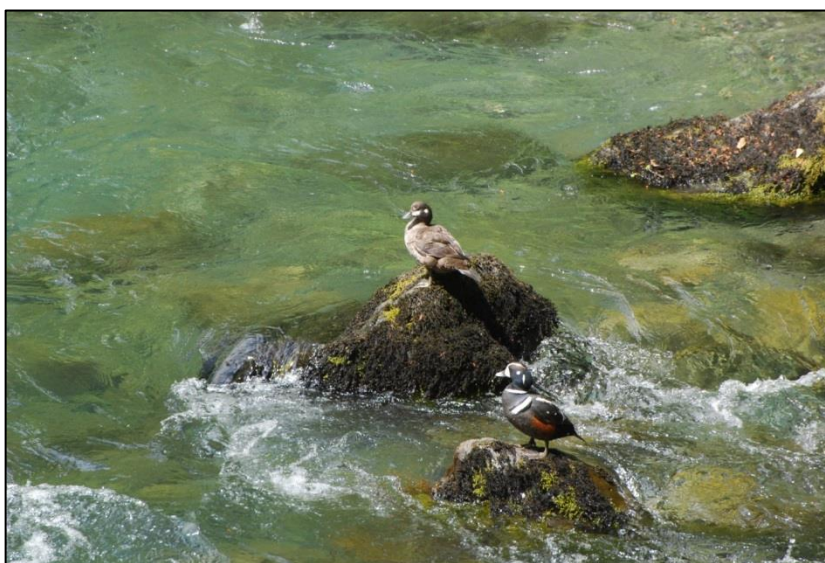
NOTABLE HUNTING CHANGES

Hunting season and harvest guidelines are similar to 2016.

DUCKS

COMMON SPECIES

A wide variety of ducks inhabit District 15. Common dabbling ducks include northern pintail, American wigeon, gadwall, mallard, green-wing teal, and northern shoveler. Species of divers, including bufflehead, scaup, ring-necked ducks, and common goldeneye, are also present on fresh and salt water. Nesting wood ducks can be located throughout the district early in the season and can provide a unique hunting opportunity.



Sea ducks, including scoters, Barrow’s goldeneye, long-tailed ducks (formerly oldsquaws), canvasbacks, and harlequin ducks inhabit Hood Canal and other saltwater areas.

POPULATION STATUS

Pacific Flyway waterfowl populations have remained strong for several years, allowing fairly liberal seasons for many species. However, in Washington, total wintering duck populations have declined and were 4.5 percent below 10-year averages in 2016 (WDFW 2016 Status and Trend Report).

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

District 15 hunters can expect similar hunting opportunities during the 2017 season. As in recent years, hunter success will be largely driven by rainfall and storm events during the waterfowl season. A lack of flooded farm fields can sharply reduce hunting opportunities in District 15. Alternatively, the marine waters of Hood Canal can offer some good waterfowl hunting opportunities.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Public hunting access exists at the mouths of the Duckabush, Quilcene, and Union rivers. Many of the undeveloped lakes and marshes on the Tahuya Peninsula's DNR land offer an untapped and remote walk-in hunting opportunity for mallards, ringnecks, and scaup.

Due to extensive residential development on the shorelines, saltwater hunting opportunities are limited, especially in Kitsap County. Always check with the sheriff's department for county shooting closures before hunting.

Also, be sure to check the 2017 Migratory Waterfowl Regulation pamphlet for additional requirements before hunting sea ducks (long-tailed ducks, scoter, harlequin, and goldeneye) in western Washington [by clicking here](#).

GEESE

COMMON SPECIES

The subspecies of Canada geese most likely to be found in District 15 include western, lesser, Taverner's, and cackler. White-fronted and, occasionally, snow geese can also be encountered.

POPULATION STATUS

Like ducks, goose numbers in the district are largely driven by weather. The more severe the weather, the more likely the northern subspecies can be seen in the area. The local westerns are stable or slightly increasing.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

Goose hunting opportunities in District 15 are expected to be similar to trends observed during the last few seasons. Most geese are taken on private farm fields and securing permission is essential. When funding exists, WDFW attempts to lease fields that regularly attract waterfowl.

PUBLIC LAND OPPORTUNITIES

Same as those listed under ducks.

FOREST GROUSE

SPECIES AND GENERAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

Although grouse occur throughout the district, Mason County offers the most opportunity for the hunter. The Olympic National Forest and Skokomish valley are two of the more popular grouse hunting areas. Blue (sooty) grouse tend to occur in the coniferous forests at higher elevations, while ruffed grouse can occur throughout the district in coniferous and mixed forests. In the fall, either species can be found in clear cuts feeding on berries like salal, Oregon grape, and huckleberry.

POPULATION STATUS

WDFW does not conduct any standardized or formal surveys to monitor grouse populations in District 15.

HARVEST TRENDS AND 2017 PROSPECTS

The number of grouse harvested in District 15 has been consistently low in Kitsap and, although lower than some previous years, has been trending upward in Jefferson and Mason recently (Figure 10). Grouse harvest in Jefferson County includes areas in the western part of the county located in District 16.

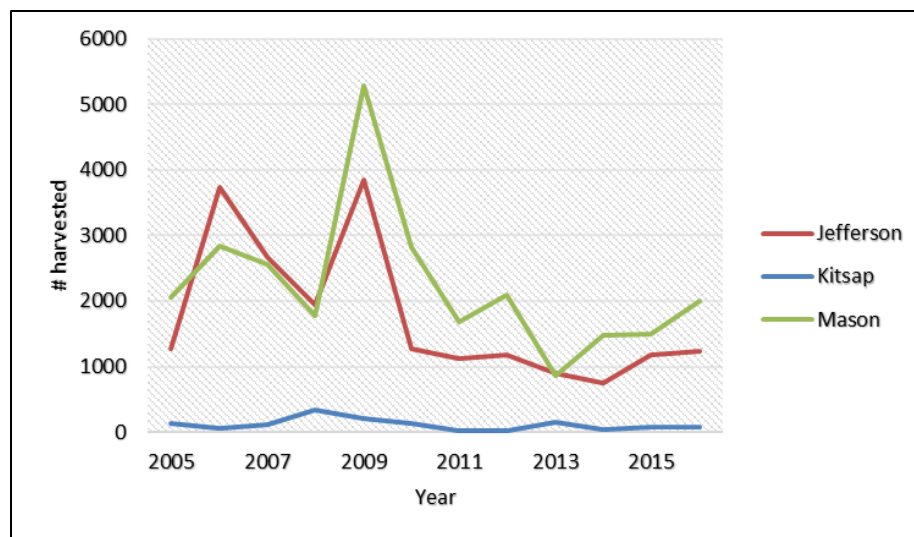


Figure 10. The number of grouse harvested in Jefferson, Kitsap, and Mason Counties during 2005 – 2016.

PHEASANTS

There are no viable populations of wild pheasants in District 15. All pheasant hunting opportunities in District 15 are associated with the Western Washington Pheasant Release Program. The primary intent of this program is to provide an upland bird hunting opportunity and to encourage participation from young and older-aged hunters. Each year, 30,000 to 40,000 pheasants are released at 25 sites, and three of those sites (Hunter Farms, Belfair, and the Sgt. Mak site) are in District 15. Release site locations can be found at GoHunt on the WDFW website or at the Peninsula Birdhunters Association website at <http://birdhunters.homestead.com/>.

QUAIL

Although frustratingly unpredictable, quail in District 15 are most likely to be found in two- to six-year-old clear cuts, under power lines, and in tall stands of scotch broom throughout Mason and Kitsap counties. Their tendency to run rather than fly or hold for a pointing dog makes them an especially challenging upland game bird. Locations to try include the DNR parcels on the Tahuya Peninsula northwest of Belfair and the industrial timberlands between Shelton, Matlock, and McCleary. Walk-in opportunities are also numerous on timber company clearcuts around Mason Lake. The time to scout is in the spring and early summer when the males are quite vocal.

TURKEYS

There are no sizable turkey populations in District 15. The turkeys that can be found in District 15 are eastern wild turkeys. Approximately 400 eastern wild turkeys were introduced into southwest Washington from 1987-2000. Introduction programs have been discontinued because populations did not appear to expand and habitat suitability models indicated southwest Washington habitats were not likely to support viable turkey populations. Occasionally, single birds are spotted, but this district cannot be recommended as a place to bag a turkey.

BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Band-tailed pigeons are the largest species of pigeon in North America. They inhabit mountainous forests in the western United States, with large coastal populations occurring from British Columbia south to northern California. During the breeding season (April to September), band-tailed pigeons are found below 1,000 feet in elevation. In autumn, they feed mainly on berries, nuts, grains, acorns, and fruits.

POPULATION STATUS AND TREND

WDFW monitors band-tailed pigeon populations using a standardized population index survey. These surveys occur at 15 mineral sites where band-tails are known to congregate. Since WDFW initiated the standardized mineral site survey, the population index indicates band-tailed populations have fluctuated through the years, but have never declined to levels that would warrant more limited harvest opportunities.

HARVEST TRENDS

Band-tailed pigeon harvest in District 15, and statewide, showed an increasing trend until it declined sharply following the 2009 season. However, this decline in harvest was associated with a similarly sharp decline in hunter numbers, so harvest declines are not believed to be associated with a similarly sharp decline in population size. Harvest in District 15 occurs mostly in Mason County, which averages 48 birds taken per year.

WHERE AND HOW TO HUNT BAND-TAILED PIGEONS

Often times, band-tailed pigeons congregate in areas with red elderberry, which are typically most abundant in five to 10-year-old clear cuts. Hunting can be exceptionally good in these areas. The key to harvesting band-tails is scouting because it is hard to predict which clear cuts will be used. Hunters need to locate feeding, roosting, and watering sites and then sit patiently and wait for shooting opportunities as they occur.

As indicated by the mineral site survey WDFW uses to monitor trends in population size, band-tails often congregate at seeps and mineral sites. In addition, they show strong site fidelity to these locations and often return to the same seeps year after year. However, many of these sites are difficult to find because they are not abundant and occur in obscure areas. If hunters are lucky enough to locate a mineral site where band-tails are congregating, they will likely have success hunting these locations for years to come.

SPECIAL REGULATIONS

Since band-tail seasons were re-opened in 2002, hunters have been required to purchase a migratory bird authorization, report their harvest using harvest cards, and submit that information to WDFW after the season has closed. These regulations will apply in 2017, as well. Hunters will have a nine-day season from September 15-23.

Hunters should review the 2017 Migratory Waterfowl & Upland Game Seasons Pamphlet to confirm season dates, harvest reporting, and any other regulation changes.

OTHER SMALL GAME SPECIES

Other small game species and furbearers that inhabit District 15 but were not covered in detail include eastern cottontail rabbits, snowshoe hares, coyotes, beaver, bobcat, raccoons, river otter, marten, mink, muskrat, and weasels. Additional migratory birds include snipe and coot. Crows are also abundant in District 15.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF HUNTER ACCESS IN EACH GMU

Although District 15 is not well known for large amounts of public land opportunities, they do exist on lands administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in all District 15 GMUs. One online resource provided by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office can help identify public lands and can be found [online](#).

The vast majority of hunting opportunities, especially for big game and upland birds, in District 15 occur on private industrial forestlands owned by several timber companies, which allow access for hunting under a range of restrictions. See below for GMU-specific information on land access and ownership. All hunters are encouraged to check ahead of time to determine if any landowner restrictions apply to the area they plan to hunt.

The following rating system was developed to give hunters a general idea of what type of access is available in the GMU they are thinking of hunting. Access ratings are specific to the level of motorized access allowed and does not refer to the level of access in general. Several GMUs have some type of fee access areas that grant the permit or lease holders a higher level of access. The following ratings are based on a hunter not having a lease or permit. Each GMU was given a rating of excellent, good, or poor, with the level of access associated with each rating as follows:

- **Excellent** – Most if not all of the main logging roads are open to motorized access, as well as most of the spur roads.
- **Good** – There is a mix of open and closed roads, with most main logging roads open, but many of the spur roads are closed to motorized access.
- **Poor** – Most of the GMU is closed to motorized access, but is open to non-motorized access. Private timberlands may require an access permit.

Information provided is a brief description of major landowners and the level of motorized access a hunter can expect. Access rules change through the seasons and vary by year. Hunters are encouraged to contact the WDFW Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) or the specific land owner if they have questions related to recreational access.

GMU 621 (Olympic) – Access rating: Good

Access in GMU 621 is good for deer hunters and challenging for elk hunters, as most elk are found on lower-elevation private lands along the major river valleys. This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, DNR, and USFS. Access to USFS land is generally allowed year round. DNR land is accessible to motorized vehicles or walk-in only in most areas. All private agricultural lands require owner permission to hunt.

GMU 624 (Coyle) – Access rating: Poor

Other than the resident elk herd in the Sequim area, the Coyle Unit is usually considered a deer area. Although there are scattered timberlands publicly owned by DNR, most forest lands are privately owned. The largest property manager is Olympic Resource Management, which is a division of Pope Resources Company, and information on public access for their lands can be found at [Olympic Resource Management](#). Although some DNR and private mainlines may be open to motor vehicles, most hunting access is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicle.

GMU 627 (Kitsap) – Access rating: Poor

The Kitsap Unit is a highly developed area, with private property throughout. However, there is still ample hunting opportunity on forest lands. DNR owns a considerable amount of land in the western part of the unit. Olympic Resource Management (Pope) and Green Diamond Resource Company also have holdings here. Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles, except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of their land in this unit.

GMU 633 (Mason) – Access rating: Poor

The Mason Unit is best known as an area for deer. DNR has forest land throughout, with extensive holdings on the Tahuya Peninsula. In the Mason Unit, most of the deer hunting occurs on private property controlled by the [Green Diamond Resource Company](#) and the [Manke Lumber Company](#). Whether state or private, most access in this unit is walk-in or by non-motorized vehicles, except that DNR allows ATV use on designated trails on some of their land in this unit.

GMU 636 (Skokomish) – Access rating: Good

This GMU is a mixture of private timberlands, private lands, and USFS. [Green Diamond Resource Company](#) is the largest private timberland owner in this unit and they generally open most areas to motorized access from September to the end of December. However, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. For areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

Upper elevations and those portions of this GMU in the upper Wynoochee River and Skokomish River Valleys are primarily USFS, with most areas open year round for vehicle access. Some USFS land is gated and closed to motorized access to minimize disturbance to elk.

GMU 651 (Satsop) – Access Rating: Good trending to Poor

The primary area accessed by hunters is owned by [Green Diamond Resource Company](#). They generally open some gates to motorized access from September to the end of December. However, exceptions for fire danger and active logging operations may delay gate openings. Beginning in 2013, a large portion of their property in this GMU will require a recreation access permit. For more information, check the Green Diamond Resources [website](#) or (360) 427-4737. For other areas behind closed gates, access is by non-motorized means throughout the year.

PRIVATE LANDS ACCESS PROGRAM

Hunters are encouraged to call the Region 6 office in Montesano (360-249-4628) or periodically check for updated information on [WDFW's Hunter Access website](#) for the most current information on private lands access in District 15.

ONLINE TOOLS AND MAPS

Most GMUs in District 15 are a checkerboard of ownerships and sometimes it can be extremely difficult to determine who owns the land where a hunter wishes to hunt. However, there are some

online tools and resources that can provide valuable information to help solve the landowner puzzle. The following is a list and general description of tools and resources available to the general public.

Department of Natural Resources Public Lands Quadrangle (PLQ) Maps

The best source for identifying the specific location of public lands are DNR PLQ maps, which can be purchased for less than \$10 on DNR's website [here](#).

Online Parcel Databases

Parcel ownership can be accessed in all three counties in District 15 by going to their county assessor's webpage and viewing the parcel maps.

WDFW's Go Hunt Tool

WDFW's GoHunt tool provides hunters with a great interactive tool for locating tracts of public land within each GMU; access from WDFW's hunting website or by [clicking here](#).

Washington State Public Lands Inventory

Provided by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, this online mapping tool displays public lands in Washington State. To access this map, go to Washington State Public Lands Inventory website.